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'For Summer is Acome Unto Day'
Jonathan Baldock and Henry Bourne
Curated by Simon Costin

Simon Costin juxtaposes Jonathan Baldock's art with artefacts from The Museum of British Folklore's collection and photographs from Henry Bourne's British Folklore Portraits project

In 2008 I was walking past a gallery in London when I happened to glance into their window. There staring back at me was an unnerving but extraordinarily beautiful face. Life sized with glass eyes and elaborate plaited hair but with flesh made up of something I couldn't quite put my finger on. An exploration of the gallery revealed a forest of chipboard plinths, each topped with a whole variety of complex and colourful heads. Several of them had leaves covering the mouths and I was reminded of the carvings in early churches of Foliate Heads or Green Men, as they are more commonly known.

Fast forward to 2012 and I find myself in the process of establishing the UK's first ever Museum dedicated to British Folklore. When Julia Muggenburg approached me to curate an exhibition at Belmacz Gallery consisting of Jonathan's work placed alongside items from the museum's collection and the photographic folk portraits of Henry Bourne, I was intrigued. Here was an opportunity to learn more about Jonathan's work and to see if the folkloric resonances that I had felt when I first saw the head in 2008 were true or false. Many of the seasonal events, which take place in the UK, involve the use of masks and costumes, always made by hand. Many customs have elements of ritual and repeated behaviour patterns, songs or chants.

For this exhibition I was interested to set a replica of the *Red Ribbon Obby Oss* mask alongside one of Jonathan's expressive fabric heads, to set up a dialogue between a *Kern Babby* made from the last sheaf of corn cut from a field at harvest time, with '*Tumbling Towards Ecstasy (Columbina)*', a ceramic face sprouting ears of wheat with perhaps Henry Bourne's image of the *Whittlesea Straw Bear*, an enormous figure made from corn. Three objects linked by material with perhaps sacrificial meaning. Many of the titles of Jonathan's pieces hint at profane rites and whilst it has been proven that Britain's seasonal events are by no means pre-Christian, people seem to have an overpowering desire to link them to dark and ancient ceremonies, hinting at links to our Pagan past lurking just beneath the surface of the everyday. Mankind has always had the urge to celebrate and perform, to mark the turning of the year and to create objects in veneration to our Gods and Goddesses, whoever or whatever they may be. As this exhibition proves, those desires are alive and kicking in the 21st Century and are experiencing a huge revival of interest.

— *Simon Costin*

For more information about '*For Summer is Acome Unto Day*' please contact Kayleigh Underdown at Belmacz: press@belmacz.com or call +44 (0)20 7629 7863